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ABSTRACT

In the Education Commission Report #4 of Hong Kong, three dimensions of learning are noted: cognitive, interpersonal, and aesthetic. In most Hong Kong schools, teaching focuses on the cognitive dimension and to some extent on the interpersonal. The aesthetic dimension is largely ignored, except for the ubiquitous class reader and a handful of schools where literature is included in the teaching program. For example, when poetry (a particularly neglected area) is taught, students are usually so taken up with the literal meaning of the verse and the technical analysis of form, rhyme-scheme, mood, tone, etc., that they miss the affective, emotional, and imaginative aspects of the poem. One way to enhance the intuitive and imaginative side of teaching poetry would be through "deep processing," a strategy used for generating mental pictures, sensations, emotions, and linguistic information about the subject of a thought. When a person thinks about something, he or she usually involves him- or herself in a combination of sensations, thoughts, images, and feelings. Deep processing helps students to experience poetry holistically through exercises that help develop their affective tendencies. It stimulates creative thinking and helps students: (1) expand information; (2) focus on information which has just been presented; (3) think in non-verbal terms; and (4) retrieve information. The poem "Jelly on a Plate" may be used in a lesson that involves primary students in experiencing a poem and miming the movement of jelly. (Contains two figures and copies of the poems used.) (TB)

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ED 388 977

DEEP PROCESSING, DRAMA AND POETRY

H.P.C. Hepburn

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Introduction

Education Commission Report 4 recommends that the:

> quality of individual learning in Hong Kong's schools would be improved through the development of a framework of targets and target-related assessments (TTRA)... (TTRA: An Overview: 1992).

The targets are organised in a hierarchy from the general to the specific as shown in Figure 1.

It is to be noted that three dimensions are stated - Cognitive, Interpersonal and Aesthetic. In most schools in Hong Kong, teaching focuses on the Cognitive dimension and to some extent the Interpersonal dimension. The Aesthetic dimension is by and large ignored, except for the ubiquitous class reader and a handful of schools where literature is included in the teaching programme.

If the intended balance in the three dimensions is to be achieved then teachers will have to pay more attention to the Aesthetic dimension. In an attempt to help teachers come to terms with teaching this dimension, this paper will concentrate on the Aesthetic dimension, and in particular on one neglected aspect of it - poetry.

Deep Processing, Drama and Poetry

Poetry is an experience, a highly personal one but an experience nonetheless, which appeals not only to the intellect and imagination but also stimulates the senses, the emotions as well as feelings. A sensitive presentation of a poem should hence suggest, in addition to the conceptual meaning, the variety of its sound and poetic movement, the subtle observations of the poet and the drama inherent in its words.

Yet students, usually for examination reasons, are so taken up with the literal meaning of the verse and the technical analysis of form, rhyme-scheme, mood, tone etc. that they miss the affective, the emotional and imaginative aspects of a poem. For them poetry is a limited and limiting experience, a thing of mere technique devoid of imagery and emotion.

Figure 1

Hierarchy of Targets

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">Curriculum</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">Curricular area</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Arts & Crafts</td><td colspan="2">Languages</td><td colspan="2">Sciences etc.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">English</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">Dimensions (purposes)</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Cognitive</td><td colspan="2">Interpersonal</td><td colspan="2">Aesthetic</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">Within Dimensions</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Developing knowledge</td><td>Applying knowledge</td><td>Social Inter-action</td><td>Problem solving with others</td><td>Personal Response</td><td>Personal Expression</td></tr>
<tr><td>TRO'S</td><td>TRO'S</td><td>TRO'S</td><td>TRO'S</td><td>TRO'S</td><td>TRO'S</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tasks</td><td>Tasks</td><td>Tasks</td><td>Tasks</td><td>Tasks</td><td>Tasks</td></tr>
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How then can one encourage students to read the personal signature of the poet; to feel with him the impingement - intrusion even - of his words on their senses; to rise to the challenge he makes to their intuition?

One way is through deep-processing, a strategy used for generating mental pictures, sensations, emotions and linguistic information about the subject of a thought. When we think about something we usually involve ourselves in a combination of the following:

We envisage some person, place, thing or event i.e. we produce mental pictures.

2. We feel sensations about the person, place, thing or event, i.e. we experience physical sensations.

3. We generate feelings about the person, place, thing or event, i.e. we produce emotions.

4. We translate the above into words about the person, place, thing or event, i.e. we produce linguistic information.

We can illustrate this point by examining what we did this morning. You may well conjure up:

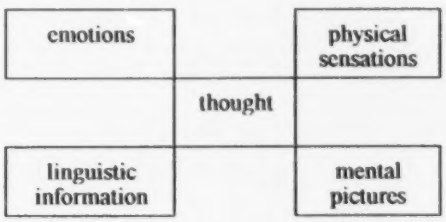
(a) a picture of yourself getting out of bed, stretching, yawning, taking a shower, brushing your teeth etc., i.e. the mental pictures;

(b) some of the sensations accompanying your activities, the smell of the air in the bathroom, the feel of the soap, the taste of the toothpaste etc., i.e. the physical sensations;

(c) some of your feelings e.g. dismay or irritation when the soap slipped from your hand or the water was too cold/hot, the toast too soggy or burnt etc., i.e. the emotions;

(d) a kind of internal narration - I got up, walked to the bathroom, turned on the shower, put toothpaste on my toothbrush etc., i.e. the linguistic information.

The way these components of a thought inter-relate and overlap is shown below:



In deep-processing a thought is expanded by consciously generating the parts of a thought so that it includes the components shown above. For example:

1. Can you recall in detail what your office looks like? - mental picture

2. Can you remember what a mango tastes like? - physical sensation

3. Can you remember what your feelings were during the last typhoon? - emotions

4. Can you put into words any of the above? - linguistic data

If so, let us proceed a step further. Imagine you have a red balloon in your hand. Blow it up. What shade of red is it? How big is the balloon? What is its shape? What kind of smell does it have? Now let go of the balloon. Did it float upwards/sideways or what?

If you were able to cope with that activity, then next imagine you are a raindrop. In your mind's eye describe your shape, colour etc. and as you float down relate to us the sounds you hear, the smells you meet, the tastes you experience etc. Tell us what floating is like; what it feels like to 'land' and whether it was a pleasant experience - or not!

For a more realistic experience, describe what happened when you last swam in the sea. Describe the feel of the water on your body, 'feel' the way the water held up your body, smell the sea-weed, taste the salt of the water, notice the sea-creatures, the small fish, jelly-fish, their colours, bodies, and how they move through the water.

The benefits of such processing are numerous and include the following:

1. It stimulates creative thinking.

2. It helps students expand information.

3. It helps students focus on information which has just been presented to them.

4. It helps students to think in non-verbal terms.

5. It helps students to retrieve information, because the attachment of mental pictures, emotions and physical sensations to linguistic expression of these is a powerful memory device.

If we now apply deep-processing plus elements of drama to the three poems *Jelly on a Plate* by M. Haselden (Primary), *The Listeners* by W. de la Mare (Intermediate) and *Five Ways to Kill a Man* by Edwin Brock (Senior), we might just expose our students not merely to a tip-toeing through the technical features of the poems, but also to an exercise in experience which may enhance their view of words and the images they evoke, and add an extra dimension to their learning.

The poem *Jelly on a Plate* (Appendix 1) is a straightforward activity for Primary students, and involves the saying of the poem and miming the movement of the jelly as suggested by the words 'wibble' and 'wobble'. The very act of miming the movement of the jelly, forces learners to go beyond the surface presentation of the words and to think more deeply about the meaning of the poem. Such a process also adds that important element in learning - 'fun'!

The poem *The Listeners* by W. de la Mare (Appendix 2) also lends itself to this type of activity. Important issues to be decided include:

1. Time - present/past/future?

2. Place - this world/another planet/another world altogether?

3. People - dead/alive/aliens?

4. Voices - matter of fact/ethereal/other worldly?

5. Speech - soft/loud/quick/slow/deliberate?

6. Other sounds - animal/bird/elemental (wind)?

7. Atmosphere - bright/cheery/eerie/spooky?

If you divide the poem up into speeches as indicated in Appendix 2, the whole class and twelve special voices are used. The question of 'how' to say the lines can be determined by referring students to the seven points above and encouraging them to deep-process their ideas.

However, before the poem can be rendered aloud, the sound effects have to be dealt with. These are:

a. horse's hooves (approaching) - before line 1

b. knock on the door - line 2

c. horse eating - line 3

d. bird flying - line 5

e. second knock on door - line 7

f. stirrup/hoof-beat - line 23

g. horse eating - line 23

h. third knock - line 25

i. stirrup - line 33

j. horse's hooves (departing) - line 34

The hoof-beats of the horse can be achieved by a student drumming his/her fingers on the desk. The sound of the stirrup can be achieved by the use of keys and the sound of one or two hoof-beats on the stone path by hitting the keys against the cover of a book. The sound of the bird flying can be simulated by using a book which is opened and nearly closed several times in quick succession. A student could mimic a horse chewing.

Having distributed the tasks (by now most of the class will have a task) there remains the job of orchestrating the voices and sound effects so that they gel to form a whole. For example, where will the first knock occur, before line 1 or after line 2? Again where will the sound of the bird flying be heard, during, before or after line 5? Where will the sound of the departing horse be placed, after line 34 or after line 36?

This blending of drama and deep-processing is not only an attempt to develop correct stress, intonation, rhythm and pronunciation but an invitation to the students to assume a role, to 'feel' the words of the poet and thus to read with appropriate emotional intensity. For example, the contrast between solo and choral voices, between male and female cadences can inject an eerie, almost ethereal quality into the rendering of the poem. In this way students come a little closer to a deeper understanding of the power of words and hence a greater awareness of the poet's statements.

The poem *5 ways to kill a man* (Appendix 3) is thought suitable for more senior classes and can be treated in a similar way. However, it affords students an opportunity to do some background data collection, e.g. into Biblical times, medieval battles as well as modern warfare. It also allows the use of group work in that each group could be responsible for one verse.

Sound effects can be either self-made or taken from published sources. The sound track of the Battle of Agincourt in Olivier's film of Henry V could provide the sound effects for verse 2. For verse 3, Joan Littlewood's *Oh, what a Lovely War* contains all the materials needed. These items can be borrowed fairly easily from a library, e.g. the British Council Library.

What would be interesting is the way in which verse 5 is handled. For example, would a tape recording of any busy city street be sufficient if accompanied by student voice-overs giving only the news headlines?

If, by allying deep-processing and drama techniques and applying these to a study of a poem, students can be made more aware of the feelings, emotions and images that words evoke, then the teaching of poetry may well encompass not only the technical aspects of poetry but afford students greater access to the affective, emotional and imaginative realms as well.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the estate of Walter de la Mare for permission to reproduce *The Listeners* (Appendix 2). The author has attempted to gain permission to print the two poems in Appendices 1 and 3, but no reply has yet been received. Any information leading to contacting the relevant copyright holders will be greatly appreciated.

Jelly on a plate.
Jelly on a plate.
Wibble, wobble, wibble, wobble,
Jelly on a plate.

APPENDIX 2

The Listeners (Walter de la Mare)

1. 'Is there anyone there?' said the traveller - *solo narrator*
2. Knocking on the moonlit door. - *all*
3. And his horse in the silence champed the grasses) *boys*
4. Of the forest's ferny floor)
5. And a bird flew up out of the turret) *girls*
6. Above the traveller's head.)
7. And he smote upon the door a second time. - *all*
8. 'Is there anyone there?' he said. - solo *narrator*
9. But no-one descended to the traveller. - *solo girl*
10. No head from the leaf-fringed sill)
11. Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes) *1st group of 4 girls*
12. Where he stood perplexed and still:)
13. But only a host of phantom listeners - *solo boy*
14. Who dwelt in the lone house then)
15. Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight) *1st group of 4 boys*
16. To that voice from the world of men;)
17. Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair, - *girls*
18. That goes down to the empty hall, - *boys*
19. Harkening in an air stirred and shaken - *girls*
20. By the lonely traveller's call. - *boys*
21. And he felt in his heart their strangeness,) *girls*
22. Their stillness answering his cry)
23. While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf) *boys*
24. Neath the starred and leafy sky;)
25. For he suddenly smote on the door, even) *all*
26. Louder, and lifted his head :)
27. 'Tell them I came, and no-one answered,
28. 'That I kept my word,' he said. - *solo narrator*
29. Never the least stir gave the listeners - *solo girl*
30. Though every word he spoke)
31. Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house) *2nd gp of 4 girls*
32. From the one man left awake : *solo boy*
33. Aye, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,) *2nd group of 4 boys*
34. And the sound of iron on stone,)
35. And how the silence surged softly backward,) *all*
36. When the plunging hoofs were gone.)

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APPENDIX 3

5 Ways To Kill A Man (Edwin Brock)

There are many cumbersome ways to kill a man;
you can make him carry a plank of wood
to the top of a hill and nail him to it. To do this
properly you require a crowd of people
wearing sandals, a cock that crows, a cloak
to dissect, a sponge, some vinegar and one
man to hammer the nails home.

Or you can take a length of steel,
shaped and chased in a traditional way,
and attempt to pierce the metal cage he wears.
But for this you need white horses,
English trees, men with bows and arrows,
at least two flags, a prince and a
castle to hold your banquet in.

Dispensing with nobility, you may, if the wind
allows, blow gas at him. But then you need
a mile of mud sliced through with ditches,
not to mention black boots, bomb craters,
more mud, a plague or rats, a dozen songs
and some round hats made of steel.

In an age of aeroplanes, you may fly
miles above your victim and dispose of him by
pressing one small switch. All you then
require is an ocean to separate you, two
systems of government, a nation's scientists,
several factories, a psychopath and
land that no one needs for several years.

These are, as I began, cumbersome ways
to kill a man. Simpler, direct, and much more neat
is to see that he is living somewhere in the middle
of the twentieth century, and leave him there.